



NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE

Humanities

DIVISION OF RESEARCH PROGRAMS

## **Narrative Section of a Successful Application**

The attached document contains the grant narrative and selected portions of a previously funded grant application. It is not intended to serve as a model, but to give you a sense of how a successful application may be crafted. Every successful application is different, and each applicant is urged to prepare a proposal that reflects the unique qualities of his or her project. Prospective applicants should consult the Research Programs application guidelines at

<http://www.neh.gov/grants/guidelines/fellowships.html> for instructions.

Applicants are also strongly encouraged to consult with the NEH Division of Research Programs staff well before a grant deadline.

Note: The attachment only contains the grant narrative and selected portions, not the entire funded application. In addition, certain portions may have been redacted to protect the privacy interests of an individual and/or to protect confidential commercial and financial information and/or to protect copyrighted materials.

Project Title: Heidegger, Art, and Postmodernity

Institution: University of New Mexico, Albuquerque

Project Director: Iain Thomson

Grant Program: Fellowships

## Heidegger: A Philosophical Biography

Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) is now widely recognized as one of the most influential and controversial philosophers of the twentieth century, yet no one has written a philosophically substantive biography systematically linking the lifelong transformation of Heidegger's philosophical views with the fascinating and troubling events of his life and times. There is serious need for such a work. Although no other thinker has more profoundly shaped the theoretical landscape of the contemporary humanities, the difficulties posed by Heidegger's jarring combination of philosophical originality and idiosyncratic language are legendary. As a result, his philosophy remains deeply contentious and little understood outside a narrow circle of devoted specialists. In fact, however, Heidegger's world is not so distant from our own. His thinking emerged from his personal involvement with some of the twentieth century's most important political events, philosophical movements, and intellectual figures. The purpose of *HEIDEGGER: A PHILOSOPHICAL BIOGRAPHY* is to restore Heidegger's thinking to the concrete context from which it emerged and so render his full philosophical development and significance comprehensible to a broad intellectual audience.

My overarching thesis is that understanding Heidegger's philosophical biography allows us to recognize his thinking as an evolving philosophical response to the tumultuous age through which he lived and so also as an enduring challenge to some dominant aspects of our contemporary self-understanding. Maintaining this thesis does not mean whitewashing Heidegger's terrible political decisions or troubling personal conduct. On the contrary, my previous book (*HEIDEGGER ON ONTOTHEOLOGY: TECHNOLOGY AND THE POLITICS OF EDUCATION* [Cambridge UP, 2005]) has been celebrated for establishing a direct connection between Heidegger's philosophy and his involvement with Nazism in the 1930s as well as for showing how some of the most important aspects of Heidegger's later thinking emerged from that appalling involvement. Employing such a balanced approach again here, this philosophical biography will adopt a sympathetic yet critical stance toward Heidegger's entire career of thought. Methodologically, I will avoid the extremes of apologists and critics alike, instead seeking to combine the in-depth textual knowledge characteristic of the most devoted Heideggerians with the independence of mind typical of his best critics. This approach will allow me to clearly and unflinchingly examine and elucidate the fascinating and sometimes disturbing details of Heidegger's life and work without capitulating to that facile imperative to either "condemn or exonerate" him which continues to polarize and distort attempts to explain his philosophical significance to the broader public.

Such a work is greatly needed because Heidegger's philosophy is in the paradoxical situation of being both notoriously difficult to understand and yet also extremely influential. The heated controversies surrounding his work stem not only from his infamous decision to throw the weight of his thought behind the Nazi movement in 1933, but also from the fact that some of the most powerful counter-currents in contemporary philosophy take their inspiration directly from Heidegger's thinking. Indeed, a list of the thinkers who acknowledge a profound conceptual debt to Heidegger's work would include most of the twentieth century's most important continental philosophers, influential and often controversial figures in their own right such as Hannah Arendt, Jacques Derrida, Hubert Dreyfus, Michel Foucault, Hans-Georg

Gadamer, Emmanuel Levinas, Herbert Marcuse, Richard Rorty, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Gianni Vattimo, to name but a few. These thinkers, many of whom studied with Heidegger, saw in his work the beginnings of a profound philosophical revolution and sought to continue aspects of his work in their own, however critical or original their own appropriations of his thought remain. Through their combined work, the theoretical landscape of the contemporary humanities has been shaped deeply by Heideggerian insights and ideas, for good and for ill. By avoiding Heidegger's famously recondite technical jargon in order to convey the real depth and force of his radical challenge to mainstream Western philosophy, **HEIDEGGER: A PHILOSOPHICAL BIOGRAPHY** will explain his overall philosophical development and achievement not only to mainstream philosophers, but also to literary theorists, intellectual historians, scholars of the history of philosophy, religious thinkers, and anyone else looking for an authoritative guide to the life and work of one of the twentieth century's most difficult, controversial, and important thinkers.

A great deal of important and illuminating material on and by Heidegger has come to light in the last fifteen years, with the result that it is now possible for the first time to give a systematic overview of Heidegger's philosophical career, set in the context of the main political events and philosophical movements through which he lived and the major intellectual figures with whom he interacted. As the first philosophically substantive biography linking his life with his thought, **HEIDEGGER: A PHILOSOPHICAL BIOGRAPHY** will help readers understand Heidegger's background, childhood, and youth; his education and struggles with his faith and with his marriage; his early career difficulties and the beginning of his relationships with Edmund Husserl, Karl Jaspers, and others; his early fame as a lecturer and the emergence of his distinctive phenomenological view; his interactions with his now famous early students and his notorious affair with Arendt, the "muse" of **BEING AND TIME**; his influential debate with Ernst Cassirer and the young Rudolf Carnap's consequential disillusionment with Heidegger; the route that led Heidegger first to enthusiastically join and then bitterly break with the Nazis; the scandal of his de-Nazification and his various nervous breakdowns; his recurring nightmare and its meaning; his important post-war conversations with Paul Celan, Jaspers, Marcuse, Sartre, and others; Heidegger's failed attempt to translate the *Dao De Jing*; his philosophical rebirth after the war; his initial French and Japanese reception and the beginning of his later fame; his philosophical collaborations with Medard Boss and the emergence of a new school of psychoanalysis; the great expectations of Heidegger's first trip to Greece and what he really found there; his dramatic reconciliation with Arendt; his last philosophical works, interviews, and conversations; and the significance of his final word, "thanks." These and many other fascinating details from the maelstrom of events that made up Heidegger's life will be elucidated along with a clear presentation of his major works, allowing non-specialists to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the dramatic philosophical transformations that characterized Heidegger's thinking from beginning to end.

**HEIDEGGER: A PHILOSOPHICAL BIOGRAPHY** will be a first in several ways: the first Heidegger biography written in English, the first by a philosopher, the first by a Heidegger scholar, and so the first authoritative account of the lifelong development of Heidegger's philosophical views set firmly in their personal, historical, and political context. The main problem with extant biographies of Heidegger is that they are not sufficiently philosophical; because they are not written by philosophers, let alone by experts in Heidegger's difficult work,

they cannot explain the meaning, development, or significance of Heidegger's thought. Of the major extant biographical works, Heinrich Petzet's book is simply a collection of anecdotes written by a young admirer, very useful for painting a picture of Heidegger as a human being but largely non-philosophical and completely uncritical. Conversely, the notorious work by Victor Farías is a one-sided prosecutorial brief rather than a serious work of objective scholarship and so does nothing to explain the appeal of Heidegger's philosophy or its lasting influence. Hugo Ott's important biography is brimming with historical detail but is not philosophical at all, and Ott's overemphasis on Heidegger's "struggles with his faith" borders on caricature and so has encouraged a misleadingly simplified picture of the motivations behind Heidegger's work. Rüdiger Safranski's biography represents the best effort to date, but, in addition to some factual errors, it is philosophically superficial and very badly translated into English. (The translator paid no attention to the standard English translations of Heidegger and instead translated Safranski's Heidegger quotations himself, making them even more difficult for readers to understand.) All these works are more than a decade old and so increasingly dated. Perhaps most importantly, none of them (not even Farías's virulent political critique) recognizes and explains the direct connection between Heidegger's philosophy and his Nazism, which I established in my previous book and will recapitulate and build on here.

By situating Heidegger's philosophical views within the fascinating context from which they arose and explaining their meaning and significance in clear, non-technical prose, **HEIDEGGER: A PHILOSOPHICAL BIOGRAPHY** will help a broad audience attain a comprehensive understanding of Heidegger's philosophical development and achievement. It should thereby make an important addition to the Cambridge University Press series of philosophical biographies. (After consulting experts, Beatrice Rehl, Cambridge UP's senior philosophy editor in the United States, invited me to develop the Heidegger volume for their series of biographies of philosophers written by philosophers, a series which thus far includes Terry Pinkard's **HEGEL: A BIOGRAPHY** [2000], Alastair Hannay's **KIERKEGAARD: A BIOGRAPHY** [2001], Manfred Kuehn's **KANT: A BIOGRAPHY** [2001], and Desmond Clarke's **DESCARTES: A BIOGRAPHY** [2006], with other volumes in varying stages of development.) This is obviously a multi-year project, and I am beginning my first sabbatical in the Fall of 2006 in order to work on it full-time. The receipt of an NEH Fellowship would allow me to extend this sabbatical to a full year and so continue to focus on the book for another eight months. Because I have been reading almost everything by and on Heidegger for the last fifteen years (including numerous biographies on him and his contemporaries) and teaching this work in numerous seminars, I am confident that the receipt of this NEH Fellowship will enable me to complete a draft of the first half of the book. (This means finishing a draft of the first four chapters listed below; at that point the project will become easier, because the remaining chapters build directly on my own already published work on Heidegger.)

**HEIDEGGER: A PHILOSOPHICAL BIOGRAPHY** is organized into eight chapters, corresponding to the major phases in the development of his thought. Each chapter will explain Heidegger's philosophical views in clear, non-technical language and situate these views within the context of the most important people, events, and movements of his life and times.

1. Introduction: Heidegger's Philosophical Biography

2. Home and Homeland: Heidegger's Background, Boyhood, and Youth (1889-1909)
3. The Young Heidegger: Beginning the Quest for Being (1909-1917)
4. "Rumors of the Hidden King": Heidegger's Phenomenological Decade (1917-1927)
5. Political Turmoil and Philosophical Transformation: Heidegger's Metaphysical Decade: (1927-1937)
6. The Return to Phenomenology: Heidegger's "Turn" (1937-46)
7. "Insight Into What Is": The Later Heidegger (1946-1962)
8. "Thing and World": The Last Heidegger (1962-1976)

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